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PRACTITIONER CASE

## Complex non-profit collaboration: a case study of The Advocacy Initiative

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### SYNOPSIS

The Advocacy Initiative was a partnership of a broad range of leading nonprofit organizations in Ireland, which wanted to get to grips with the challenges facing their social justice advocacy work. This case study explores lessons of collaborative project implementation from The Advocacy Initiative.

### PROJECT SETTING

Supported by The Atlantic Philanthropies, hundreds of organizations took part from 2011 to 2014 in events, research, and reflection about social justice advocacy in Ireland. Structurally, there were many different partners, including a steering committee with over 20 members; this diversity brought with it a myriad of expectations and priorities. Furthermore, the Initiative found itself simultaneously grappling with the challenges and opportunities of engaging with stakeholders its own sector, as well as others such as policymakers, media, trade unions, and the broader public.

### TARGET READER

By focusing on a particular activity or function (in this case, advocacy), the Initiative was able to build and sustain a complex nonprofit collaboration. Consequently, this case study will be of direct relevance to those pursuing similar projects, as well as researchers who are interested in the evolving nature of nonprofit collaboration.

### YEARS OF PROJECT

2011–14

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## COMPETENCIES HIGHLIGHTED

Stakeholder management is a core competency of this project, focusing especially on building a sense of community among project partners and negotiating devolved ownership of a diverse program of work while maintaining overall coherence. The typical project phases (initiating, planning, executing, monitoring and controlling, and closing) provide a structure within which to create a sense of coherence among diverse stakeholder viewpoints. The case study demonstrates how project management can provide a valuable way of coping with complexity of work and external requirements in a complex collaborative environment.

## LESSONS LEARNED

The Advocacy Initiative discovered the significance of building a collective identity for “social justice advocates.” It saw that it was possible to sustain engagement by balancing “ownership” and “devolution,” and worked hard to respond to individual priorities while also conserving an overall sense of coherence. The final lesson is one of ambition: in order to be able to engage in sensitive cross-stakeholder dialogue (particularly with policymakers), it was necessary to invest time and energy in building confidence and capacity among those involved.

## Keywords

**Collaboration, Nonprofit, Advocacy, Complexity**

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## Introduction

*There comes a point where we need to stop just pulling people out of the river. We need to go upstream and find out why they're falling in – Desmond Tutu, quoted in a presentation by Kathleen O'Meara at The Advocacy Initiative's closing conference in the Royal Dublin Society, July 2014.*

In 2008, there was a real sense in Ireland that social justice advocacy by nonprofit organizations was under threat from the state. The experience of many advocates and their organizations was that the state was actively working to silence advocacy. However, there were few forums for the nonprofit sector, commonly known as the “community and voluntary sector” in Ireland, to discuss and reflect on social justice advocacy – the threats it faced, and its purpose, methodologies, effectiveness, assumptions, and legitimacy. Where spaces did exist, there were low levels of trust and not always room for dissent from dominant narratives (Murphy 2014). The Advocacy Initiative was established to provide the opportunity for the sector to come to grips with these challenges and consider more deeply its advocacy function.

The Advocacy Initiative defined advocacy as “planned, organized and sustained actions undertaken by community and voluntary sector organizations, the purpose of which is to influence public policy outcomes, with and/or on behalf of the communities they work with” (The Advocacy Initiative 2012a). While advocacy generally is a much broader concept, relating to a wide range of actors, it is specifically recognized as a function of nonprofit organizations (Andrews & Edwards 2004, p. 481; Balassiano & Chandler 2009, p. 947; Onyx et al. 2008, p. 632). In Ireland, a variety of nonprofit organizations undertake advocacy. For example, a 2012 study by The Advocacy Initiative estimated that 39 percent of nonprofits are engaged in social justice advocacy and a further

12 percent engage in broader advocacy, hence 51 percent of organizations undertake activities aimed at influencing public policy decisions. The majority (68 percent) said they were doing more advocacy than three years ago (CMAAdvice Ltd. 2012, p. 44). Consequently, advocacy is a significant function of the community and voluntary sector in Ireland.

Over the course of its life, The Advocacy Initiative explored the experience of advocacy for Irish nonprofits. One of the core practice challenges that it identified for the sector was engaging in better collaboration and building strategic alliances (Walsh 2014, p. 31). Hence, it is of interest that the Initiative identified itself as an innovative form of collaboration within the community and voluntary sector. According to the Initiative's Chairperson, Kieran Murphy: "There was something unique in how the Initiative did its work. The Initiative is an example of a new and reimagined way of working together" (The Advocacy Initiative 2014). Consequently, as the former Director of The Advocacy Initiative, in this case study I want to capture what we learned about collaborative project implementation. Writing after the conclusion of the Initiative, I will draw on the Initiative's documentary record, including its final reports and the reports of its external evaluator. As an "insider researcher" (Smyth & Holian 2008), my knowledge of the Initiative is also practical and inevitably informed by my direct experience of working with those involved.

In this article, I use the term "complex" to describe the collaboration that was The Advocacy Initiative. By complex I mean that the project involved many diverse project partners, with many different perspectives and expectations. The steering committee comprised up to 21 members (see Table 1); while all were concerned with advocacy, these partners had different conceptions of what effective advocacy is and how social change happens. In addition, there were differing expectations of what the Initiative should achieve, consequently many diverse actions were planned (as I will discuss, there were 13 "sub-projects" covering the three high-level objectives – see Table 2). The Initiative also sought to engage other stakeholders in its activities and work. This complexity of structures, actions, and stakeholders reflects the high-level ambition of "reframing" the relationship between the sector and the state, and brought with it specific challenges and opportunities.

This case study is divided into two sections. The first provides an overview of the Initiative as a collaborative project. Drawing on the Project Management Institute's framework, I describe the project's five phases: initiating, planning, executing, monitoring and controlling, and closing (Project Management Institute n.d.). The second section addresses three key lessons for complex collaborative projects in the community and voluntary sector. These lessons include: the importance of the developing sense of community among social justice advocates; the need to balance "delegated" ownership with securing coherence and central control; and finally, the need to invest time and energy in building confidence and capacity to reach beyond the sector, and engage other stakeholders in difficult and contentious discussions. While The Advocacy Initiative was a project focusing on one role of the sector (that of advocacy), the project experience demonstrates that by taking such an activity lens it is possible to build deep and broad collaboration in a sector that is too often described as fragmented. Consequently, this case study will have relevance for any project that seeks to build similarly action-focused collaborations of disparate nonprofit organizations.

## Five project phases of The Advocacy Initiative

The Advocacy Initiative was a project of the community and voluntary sector that aimed to generate greater understanding of, and reflection on, social justice advocacy in Ireland. It was time bound and, in its active phase, implemented a specific program of activities from August 2011 to August 2014. Thus, taking the Project Management Institute definition of a project, it was a temporary endeavour whose aim was to achieve a specific result (Project Management Institute

n.d.). The Initiative can also be characterized as a kaleidoscope of projects; its working method was one of delivering multiple smaller projects, and inevitably this led to questions of coherence and synthesis, which I address later. In order to facilitate analysis of the Initiative as a project, in this section I will provide an overview of the Initiative using the typical five phases that characterize any project: initiating, planning, executing, monitoring and controlling, and closing.

## INITIATING

The Advocacy Initiative has its roots in a summer school organized by the Centre for Non-profit Management at a Trinity College Dublin summer school in 2008. One paper presented at the summer school controversially described the community and voluntary sector as “sleepwalking” into its future. The author went on to suggest that: “Although it is confronted with major issues – including regulation, funding, advocacy, and its role in society – there is little sense of concern or urgency, never mind awareness, to be discerned in the sector as a whole” (Keenan 2008, p. 43). These views resonated with leaders from a sector that was facing the impact of the financial crisis and the collapse of Social Partnership (the Irish system of national pay agreements between government, employers, and trade unions) (Poppellwell 2013). Several participants at the summer school agreed that the role of community and voluntary sector advocacy needed further exploration. At a subsequent workshop, a number of people agreed to progress this work further, and a steering committee initially involving individuals from 17 organizations was formed (Walsh 2014) (see Table 1).

**Table 1** Organizational members of The Advocacy Initiative steering committee (for functional purposes a number of organizations had more than one individual represented on the committee)

Amnesty International Ireland	Disability Federation of Ireland	National Women’s Council of Ireland
Barnardos	Focus Ireland	One Parent Exchange Network (OPEN)
Carmichael Centre	Free Legal Advice Centre	Simon Community National Office
Community Workers’ Cooperative	Irish Cancer Society	Society of St Vincent de Paul
Children’s Rights Alliance	Irish Charities Tax Reform Group	The Wheel
Community Platform	Irish National Organisation of the Unemployed	Trócaire

## PLANNING

The steering committee worked together for about nine months, developing the purpose and goals for a collaborative action to examine the current state of advocacy by nonprofit organizations. Securing funding from The Atlantic Philanthropies, the steering committee commissioned researchers to do an analysis of the state of social justice advocacy in Ireland. This report, which was presented in 2010, involved an online survey of nonprofit organizations, as well as interviews with community and voluntary representatives, and others

with an interest in community and voluntary sector advocacy (Montague Communications & Middlequar Ltd 2010). The steering committee subsequently used the report's recommendations as the basis for the development of a three-year work program, which The Atlantic Philanthropies also funded. Following my appointment as Director in August 2011, my first task was to formulate an implementation plan.

## EXECUTING

The implementation plan adopted in September 2011 suggested that The Advocacy Initiative was to become "a catalyst for a new relationship between the community and voluntary sector and the state." The Initiative's three key goals were reformulated as: (1) to contribute to the knowledge and understanding of social justice advocacy; (2) to stimulate informed debate on social justice advocacy within the sector and with the state; and (3) to facilitate strengthened capacity of social justice advocates. Thirteen activities were specifically associated with these goals (see Table 2). As I will discuss below, during these early months, the Initiative also developed a theory of change narrative in order to articulate how each intervention interacted with the overall objectives (The Advocacy Initiative 2012b).

Table 2 Planned project activities of The Advocacy Initiative, 2011–14

Goal	Planned activities
<i>Contribute to knowledge and understanding of social justice advocacy.</i>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Develop a definition of social justice advocacy.</li> <li>2. Map the practice of social justice advocacy in Ireland.</li> <li>3. Deepen understanding of how policymakers perceive social justice advocacy.</li> <li>4. Investigate the existence of funding vulnerability as a result of social justice advocacy.</li> <li>5. Commission a public opinion poll on the policy contribution of the community and voluntary sector.</li> </ol>
<i>Stimulate informed debate on social justice advocacy within the sector and with the state.</i>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>6. Facilitate an expert group of relevant stakeholders to promote deep reflection on social justice advocacy and the contribution of the Initiative.</li> <li>7. Promote self-reflection among social justice advocates.</li> <li>8. Develop a grassroots campaign to promote understanding of the advocacy function of the community and voluntary sector.</li> </ol>
<i>Facilitate strengthened capacity of social justice advocates.</i>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>9. Develop a knowledge exchange forum to promote peer learning and exchange within the community and voluntary sector.</li> <li>10. Investigate training and educational support for social justice advocacy.</li> <li>11. Develop a capacity building framework for social justice advocacy relevant for the community and voluntary sector and policymakers.</li> <li>12. Develop an evaluation framework for social justice advocacy.</li> <li>13. Undertake strategic initiatives aimed at strengthening capacity.</li> </ol>

This second phase of The Advocacy Initiative was financed in two ways. First, a three-year grant of €500,000 was received from The Atlantic Philanthropies. Second, €50,000 was allocated through in-kind support from Focus Ireland and the Society of St Vincent de Paul, in the form of human resources support (financial and human resources administration). The Initiative sought no other funding and raised no other resources (Table 3 provides an overview of the budget and actual spend). From the outset, the Initiative adopted a project-orientated approach to all of its work. Human resources were limited to the equivalent of one full-time staff post, while approximately half the budget was invested in consultancy or project expenditure (The Advocacy Initiative 2014).

**Table 3 Budgeted and actual spend of The Advocacy Initiative, 2011–14 (The Advocacy Initiative 2014)**

Item	Budget	Actual spend	% of spend
Staff	€223,000	€229,499	41.75%
Consultancy (including legacy strategy investment of €61,428)	€250,000	€238,544	43.4%
Evaluation	€17,000	€18,875	3.43%
Communications	€30,000	€32,418	5.9%
Administration	€30,000	€30,367	5.52%
<b>Total</b>	<b>€550,000</b>	<b>€549,703</b>	

In terms of execution of planned outputs, the results and achievements of The Advocacy Initiative are documented in three ways. First, a “synthesis report” analyzes the learning and core themes that emerged, and describes concrete outputs in terms of the Initiative’s overall goals (Walsh 2014). Second, the final external evaluation captures the activities and structures of the Initiative, providing an objective assessment of results (O’Siochru 2014); and third, the final report to The Atlantic Philanthropies, as the funder, summarizes the achievements, changes, and identified challenges (The Advocacy Initiative 2014). With regard to meeting its three core goals, the Initiative concluded that these objectives were broadly met: “We attained our three goals of building knowledge, fostering debate and reflection, and strengthening capacity. We built a strong and credible body of work that will have lasting relevance for the sector” (The Advocacy Initiative 2014, p. 7). This conclusion is supported by the results of a survey of participants conducted during the final evaluation:

*A survey in June 2014 of those participating in various ways in The Advocacy Initiative points to a high level of success overall in three key respects. Over three-quarters feel that debate and self-reflection had been stimulated within the sector, something noticeably lacking heretofore; about the same number feel that they themselves had enhanced their understanding of social justice advocacy and of the sector; and – perhaps most significantly – about half feel that their participation had led to positive changes in their practice. (O’Siochru 2014, p. 1)*



## MONITORING AND CONTROLLING

While the governance structures of the Initiative were not particularly innovative, they worked effectively. The governance structure for the active phase of the Initiative retained a steering committee with 17 members (later rising to 21), and added a management group nominated by the committee from among its members, supplemented by two external experts. Membership of both steering committee and management group remained largely the same during the course of the Initiative (O'Siochru 2014). The steering committee and management group oversaw the management of a small team, comprising of a half-time director (three years), half-time communications officer (2 years), and sporadic administrative support. In order to advise on specific strategic actions, reference groups were set up as needed, comprising those involved in the Initiative, as well as external actors. The Initiative submitted annual financial and work reports to its funder.

Following a competitive tendering process conducted in late 2011, The Initiative appointed an independent evaluator to design the evaluation framework, and to deliver an interim and final evaluation report. A decision was subsequently made to use the theory of change model (see <http://www.theoryofchange.org>). This framework began with long-term objectives and worked through the various preconditions to, ultimately, the interventions required to generate the outcomes. Complementing the theory of change, The Advocacy Initiative has also used a theory U process to describe its journey as one of focusing, broadening, and deepening reflections on social justice advocacy in Ireland (see <https://www.presencing.com/theoryu>). This tool enabled the Initiative to further reflect on the nature and consequences of the relationships between the state and social justice advocates.

## CLOSING

While the time-bound nature of the Initiative was clearly identified from the start, the potential of extending the work was nonetheless regularly discussed. However, the temporary nature of the Initiative was considered critical to securing buy-in from a broad range of actors and maintaining momentum in planned activities (O'Siochru 2014). As O'Siochru writes in his final evaluation:

*The finite lifetime created an environment in which trust and engagement of partners could be built quickly. It also freed the team to focus firmly on the more immediate outcomes sought and avoided potentially extended and divisive discussion of the “positioning” of such an entity within the sector. The idea of creating a more permanent entity, a body or network, was mooted, and the option was always present, but any attempt at it would certainly have consumed significant energies of the team and possibly led to difficulties within the group and in relation to addressing the wider sector. Furthermore, the original remit and objectives for the Initiative offered no rationale for constituting a permanent entity. (O'Siochru 2014, p. 22)*

Consequently, the Initiative closed its doors as planned after 36 months. In preparing to close, the Initiative undertook three core activities, which were not originally foreseen in its work plan. First, it took the decision to commission a synthesis report. Over the course of many discussions, the steering committee identified an objective to find a way to digest and synthesize the divergent outputs and discussions that the Initiative had facilitated. To this end, they contracted an external researcher to work with the committee on developing “Pulling together: the synthesis of The Advocacy Initiative 2010–2014” (Walsh 2014). This report,

written in the first person, provides an overview of the history of the Initiative and what it achieved. But more significantly, it records the learning of the Initiative, describing the social justice advocacy landscape in Ireland and the challenges it faces. The document also captures the next steps, as well as key resources.

Second, responding to a strong desire for the learning from the Initiative to continue, the steering committee agreed on a legacy plan in late 2013, and set about identifying a number of legacy partners. Seven members of the steering committee submitted proposals to take ownership of a number of projects. Each partner signed a contract and received an allocation of multi-annual funding (small amounts identified in the original budget of the Initiative, in agreement with the Initiative's funder).

Given the conclusion of the Initiative, no overall governance or accountability mechanisms were identified for these projects (beyond the internal mechanisms of each partner). However, the seven partners made a commitment to liaise and communicate with each other, and identified the website as a coordination tool for these projects. The legacy strategy will conclude in 2017.

Finally, the synthesis report and legacy strategy were launched at a final conference held in July 2014.

Overall, from a project planning and implementation perspective, the Initiative proved relatively straightforward and successful. The community and voluntary sector identified a need to explore the challenges facing social justice advocacy; following an initial scoping phase, resulting in the first project report, a fuller work plan was developed, human and financial resources were secured, and the plan was implemented more or less as first envisaged (O'Siochru 2014, p. 21). However, it is perhaps in the nature of collaboration itself that interesting lessons emerge for those seeking to engage in collaborative project management in the community and voluntary sector. In the next section, I will explore three core lessons that emerged from the experience of The Advocacy Initiative.

## Lessons learned for managing complex nonprofit collaborations

As I have already discussed, The Advocacy Initiative can be described as a complex collaboration. This complexity is a consequence of specific characteristics of the project, which included the range of organizations involved, the diversity of those organizations (and of their expectations), and the efforts to involve broader stakeholders. In this concluding section, I want to introduce three lessons that the Initiative learned about managing collaborative projects. The first is the significance of building a sense of "community" among social justice advocates generally, as well as more specifically among those involved in the steering committee. The second is the need to build "ownership" of the Initiative by the sector, while also maintaining coherence. The third is the need to invest time and energy in building confidence and capacity, toward engaging other stakeholders in difficult and contentious discussion.

### BUILD A COMMUNITY OF INTEREST

The final evaluation suggests that the Initiative served to build a sense of community across the social justice advocacy sector in three ways: fostering collegiality among the steering committee; creating opportunities for teamwork through specific projects; and opening



opportunity for the sector to come together and reflect on its work (The Advocacy Initiative 2014, p. 16).

Despite initial challenges, the Initiative built a broad and effective steering committee. As the final evaluation puts it, “steering committee members have reported developing strong relationships and strong levels of trust that did not previously exist” (The Advocacy Initiative 2014, p. 21). An example of team building is the way the group of participant researchers worked together on the study of perceptions of policymakers: in their acknowledgments, the researchers describe the process of combining their findings as “unifying” for them as advocates (and as researchers) (Walsh et al. 2013). Finally, in building momentum across a diverse and competitive sector, an emerging sense of shared purpose proved critical. As one participant at a Knowledge Exchange Forum put it in the Initiative’s closing video (shown at the final conference): “The Advocacy Initiative has created a generosity of spirit, an open environment for sharing and learning from each other [...] that is not going to go away.”

It appears that this sense of a “social justice advocacy” community is relatively unique in a very disparate community and voluntary sector, and for many it proved an important characteristic. It is not clear to what extent this emerging sense of common cause (or at least common method) will sustain beyond the Initiative, but for the Initiative itself it was an important factor in the success of specific projects. In the context of a sector which is often described as fragmented (Murphy 2013, p. 115), this capacity to build collaborative approaches is very significant, particularly with regard to the potential impact of social justice advocacy work (Wallace 2004, pp. 2–3).

## BALANCE OWNERSHIP AND COHERENCE

As discussed, early human resources capacity was limited and the Initiative invested heavily in drawing in external capacity, and facilitating actions within the broader community and voluntary sector. As we have seen, this approach was identified as critical to the success of the Initiative; however, it brought with it the challenge of securing coherence. For example, in implementing a series of self-directed local events, themes were not centrally coordinated but rather allowed to reflect local realities of social justice advocacy. While this may have undermined the capacity of the Initiative to compare these discussions, it did facilitate opportunities for discussion and engagement that were locally engaging. Another example is the development of the legacy strategy, through which partners took on the development of specific projects and tools, but without any oversight or governance of the strategy itself.

Given the diversity of those involved in the Initiative, the project had to manage the capacity to respond to different needs and expectations. Being relevant and responsive was critical to securing engagement in a very diverse community and voluntary sector. However, there was a need to balance this “devolution” with an overall analysis of Initiative outcomes, which led to the decision to commission the “Pulling together” report.

## INVEST IN CAPACITY AND CONFIDENCE BUILDING

The overall ambition of the Initiative was to reframe the relationship between the community and voluntary sector and the state. To this end, a number of activities were identified in the plan that sought to engage with other stakeholder groups, including those policymakers who are on the “receiving” end of advocacy. However, analysis of how the implementation plan changed over time would suggest that there was some instinct to pull back from this external engagement and focus inward on the sector itself (O’Siochru 2014). For example, instead of

running a “grassroots” campaign to articulate the case for social justice advocacy, a series of local events, mostly for the sector itself, were facilitated. Another example is the launch event for the research study on public funding of social justice advocacy, which primarily targeted the sector, with no specific dissemination activities undertaken to reach policymakers.

However, there were also other examples of the Initiative attempting new models of deepening stakeholder engagement. For example, toward the end of the Initiative, a project emerged in which the Initiative facilitated a two-day process with a range of stakeholder groups on the regulation of social justice advocacy. Consequently, the experience of the Initiative was that it took time to build the confidence and capacity to engage policymakers in difficult or contentious discussion (Hodgett & Sweeney 2010, p. 5). In fact, as policymakers were generally more open to such engagements than we had assumed, it may have been possible to engage in such actions earlier. As the perceptions study researcher put it:

*We were all very pleasantly surprised by how many of the individuals we approached agreed to be interviewed, and indeed how open and frank most of them were in the actual interview process. Some had really thought about the sector and engaged in a very deliberate way. (Walsh et al. 2013, p. 56)*

However, it took the Initiative time to build the confidence to develop this cross-stakeholder work.

## Building collaboration, overcoming silos

While we have not yet heard the final word from The Advocacy Initiative (the legacy strategy continues to 2017), this project proved a unique experience for the community and voluntary sector in Ireland. As a project, it followed the standard cycle relatively straightforwardly from initiation to conclusion; however, as an experience of complex collaboration it proved challenging and innovative. In a sector that is often described as fragmented, there is much that can be learned for future collaborative projects that similarly wish to move past the silos or sub-sectors that can characterize the nonprofit landscape.

As I have discussed, the collaboration that was the Initiative was complicated for reasons of structure, actions, and stakeholders. In this case study, I have drawn out three lessons that we learned through managing the challenges of this complex collaboration. First was the significance of building an emerging sense of community, or a common identity, among social justice advocates. While not an explicit objective of the Initiative, this outcome proved central and was identified as important by many of those involved. This experience suggests the achievability of building collaboration across a very diverse community and voluntary sector; when the focus is on a working method (or methods), deeper nonprofit collaboration is feasible (and valuable), even when individual organizations do not share a particular mission.

Second, developing broad ownership and securing relevance to this disparate community brought with it the challenge of balancing devolution with coherence. By allowing for activities that were locally responsive, the Initiative was able to broaden the range of its engagement with the community and voluntary sector. This release of central control, however, required innovative responses to securing coherence, one of which was to produce the synthesis report. This novel approach suggests that it is possible to employ creative strategies for coherence, without restricting the energy and fluidity of protagonists framing their own engagement in a way that meets local demand.

Finally, the Initiative’s capacity to reach out to broader policy stakeholders in a deeper way took time to develop and, on occasion, seemed vulnerable to the instinct to focus inwards on

the sector. Yet this work developed and, by the end of the three-year cycle, a number of projects appeared to achieve more substantial engagement with policymakers. Three years represents a relatively short period of time in which to build such cross-stakeholder collaboration; however, by first strengthening confidence, knowledge, and shared identity among nonprofit actors, the Initiative created the possibility for new forms of dialogue across stakeholder groups.

Others have suggested that the diversity of the community and voluntary sector in Ireland calls into question whether these organizations can be called a “sector” at all; but the case of The Advocacy Initiative demonstrates that it is possible to not only develop a shared program of work, but also facilitate the emergence of a shared sense of identity, in this case as social justice advocates. By focusing the project through an activity lens, The Advocacy Initiative was able to build deep and broad collaboration in a sector that is too often described as operating in silos.

## About the author

Anna Visser is a PhD Candidate at the School of Social Policy, Social Work and Social Justice in University College Dublin. She has 15 years of experience implementing projects in the nonprofit sector, and has worked on issues of anti-racism, anti-poverty, and democratic reform. From August 2011 to September 2014 Anna was Director of The Advocacy Initiative. Anna remains actively involved in the nonprofit sector in Ireland is a member of a number of campaigns and advisory groups.

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